

House Committee on Higher Education - Formal Requests for Information

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Committee Requests Related to the COVID-19 Pandemic:

1. Are institutions of higher education ensuring the health and safety of students, faculty and staff during the 2020 Fall Semester? When applicable, please speak directly to classroom and lab settings, dormitories and dining halls.

Community colleges have adopted or considered multiple protocols for their respective campus safe reopening plans. The list below is a partial list and does not reflect all protocols adopted by all college districts but is representative of many initiatives underway.

- All colleges will comply with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines, and state and county health departments;
- Many colleges are preparing multiple schedule and delivery options for Fall 2020 in light of concerns for additional waves of infections;
- Some colleges will stagger the campus reopening into multiple phases, prioritizing select technical programs (allied health, nursing, fire prevention, medical imaging, CNA, etc.);
- Some colleges will reconfigure large classrooms and labs to ensure students and faculty are able to comply with the social distancing guidelines;
- Colleges will require students, faculty, and employees to wear face masks;
- Some colleges will procure PPE (face masks and/or face shields) supplies for faculty and employees; students may have to incur the costs for their masks;
- Some colleges will conduct daily non-contact thermometer screens for students/employees;
- Some colleges are mounting plexiglass at workstations and CTE classrooms;
- Some colleges will create staggered work shifts;
- Some colleges will activate minimum entry points onto campus facilities;
- Some colleges will extend their work-from-home policies for some employees;
- Colleges are disinfecting all work sites and classrooms;
- Colleges are training on all protocols and health and safety guidelines;
- Most colleges have and will continue to expand print and digital communications with students, faculty, and employees;
- Most colleges have established protocols for reporting and responding to incidents of students, faculty, and employees who may test positive for COVID-19.

2. What plans are in place for on-campus COVID-19 testing? Do institutions have the capacity to provide testing on campus, both in terms of available supplies and labs to process tests?

Based on LBB survey results, almost all colleges plan to or are already implementing rigorous screening processes but no testing, often citing the cost. Common screening processes generally consist of:

- Online training for students and employees prior to arrival on campus
- Minimizing campus entrance points and requiring visual screening, temperature check, and verbal confirmation of lack of symptoms or contact with infected/suspected persons
- Periodic (mostly weekly) online self-certification
- Compliance monitoring, especially in large public spaces
- Agreements to cooperate with local and state health officials for any necessary contact tracing

The few colleges that will have testing on campus are generally hosting community clinics that conduct testing, though some also have their own partnerships with local healthcare providers. Some are also creating more rigorous screening and considering testing for more vulnerable individuals, including those working in labs, healthcare sites, and other close contact environments; athletes; resident students; and those who have recently traveled to known COVID hotspots.

3. If applicable, what are plans for collegiate athletics this Fall? How will student athletes be kept safe? If fans will be permitted to attend events, how will fans be kept safe?

The Texas Association of Community Colleges created the COVID-19 Athletics Workgroup on May 1 to evaluate areas of concern and potential solutions for issues affecting community college athletic programs. Three guiding questions anchored the workgroup discussions:

1. Will athletics return in the Fall 2020, and if yes, what will be different?
2. Will the National Junior College Athletics Association (NJCAA) create rules to assist in making decisions for the fall?
3. What common policies and procedures exist among community colleges affecting athletics?

The TACC Athletics Workgroup concluded that each of the 50 community college districts should determine policies and procedures that best fit their unique circumstances and needs.

All member colleges agreed to incorporate Athletics into “Campus Reopening” planning and develop physical distancing plans that fit the needs of each individual team. The TACC Athletics Workgroup recommended daily testing/wellness checks, reporting protocols, cleaning schedule recommendations, travel considerations, and competition scheduling. These considerations are subject to change as required by the CDC or other governmental restrictions associated with COVID-19.

In July, the NJCAA announced that Fall sports at community colleges will be postponed to Spring 2021. Winter sports, such as basketball, will also start in January as opposed to late Fall.

Budget & Enrollments

4. What do projected enrollment figures and formula funding look like to institutions for this school year?

5. Has there been a noticeable impact on staff or faculty retention with regard to concerns about the pandemic?

7. How have state and federal COVID-related funds already impacted budgets?

8. How has the pandemic affected the overall financial status of small and rural community colleges?

Community colleges can draw from the experiences of past economic recessions to anticipate enrollment increases. The question is whether those increases will be realized in the Fall 2020, given the active health concerns over COVID-19, or come in the Fall 2021. Under either scenario, community colleges are well positioned to support Texans seeking to upskill or reskill as they restart the Texas economy. As of Fall 2019, Texas community colleges enrolled nearly 54% of all Texas undergraduates, 92% of all CTE enrollments, and 46% of all students in higher education. We anticipate continuing to shoulder the lion's share of the enrollments in Texas postsecondary education.

While the COVID-19 pandemic is seriously stress testing the operating budgets of Texas colleges and universities, developing reliable statewide estimates of the impact's severity is challenging at this stage. The Legislative Budget Board (LBB) has been collecting monthly financial impact information from all state agencies, including higher education institutions. Although this survey was not intended to enable aggregate analyses and the data are not being reported either universally or uniformly, it has produced the best available means for estimating how the pandemic has affected community college and university finances and will continue to affect them in the near future.

TACC collected responses to the most recent iteration of the LBB survey from 37 of 50 community college districts. Based on the data actually received and estimates of the statewide figures assuming that non-reporting colleges would roughly mirror the averages of their size-based peer group, colleges across the state have experienced significant financial harm as a result of the pandemic. TACC analysis of the reported data estimates that the community college sector will experience a financial loss of \$72.2 million in FY 20 as a result of the pandemic, notwithstanding an estimated \$123 million in projected reimbursements statewide. If these figures hold, community colleges will receive reimbursement for about 63 percent of losses experienced in FY 20.

As colleges begin the fall semester, new or increased costs related to safe campus re-opening and online education are already being borne. These costs are more pronounced at small and rural colleges that are often less resourced than their large and urban counterparts. Early indications of enrollment declines, and the related declines in tuition revenue, could increase unreimbursed losses heading into the Fall 2020 semester.

9. Does your institution have a public, online dashboard for the reporting of positive COVID-19 cases which is updated daily? If so, what is the link to the dashboard?

Some colleges report having an online dashboard for reporting COVID-19 data. At time of submission, TACC is aware of the following dashboards:

- Austin Community College: <https://www.austincc.edu/coronavirus/covid-19-case-reports>
- Odessa College: <https://www.odessa.edu/employees/COVID-19Dashboard/index.html>
- Grayson College: <https://grayson.edu/campus-life/campus-police/Coronavirus%20Info/Campus%20Updates.html>

Other colleges reported internal use dashboard or other public facing resource sites.